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THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS.

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JUNE 12. THE COMMANDMENTS. Exod. XX. 1-11.

JUNE 19. THE COMMANDMENTS. Exod. XX. 12-21.

What we call the "ten commandments," are currently called in the Hebrew text "the ten words," (see Exod. XXXIV. 28; Deut. X. 4 and IV. 13, the article being used in all three places). The words of the Hebrew stem *ḡāwā*, commonly translated by the English verb "command" and its derivatives, are not currently used to denote what we call "the ten commandments," and are, perhaps, not even once used, distinctively, in this meaning. This special meaning of the word "commandment" is purely a matter of translation-usage, and not of Hebrew usage. And it is a use of language so fixed in the habits of most of us, that we need to watch ourselves very closely to keep from being misled by it.

What is thus true of the term commandment, as applied to "the ten words," is perhaps even more emphatically true of the term "law" in the same application. We are accustomed, and correctly, so far as the ethical aspects of the matter are concerned, to regard "the ten words" as being pre-eminently *the* law of Jehovah, as recorded in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, neither the Old Testament nor the New are accustomed to apply the term law distinctively to "the ten words;" it is doubtful whether they so apply it in even a single instance. In Exod. XXIV. 12, for example, we make a good sense if we regard the words law and commandment as in apposition with "the tables of stone," but there is no grammatical necessity for thus regarding them. "The ten words" are a portion of the commandments of Jehovah; they are found in the law of Jehovah; they are an especially important part of the law and the commandments; but it is not according to biblical usage to call them either by the name law or by the name commandments.

This is the more noteworthy because the Bible, instead of signalizing their importance by applying these two names to them, has other names which it uses for this purpose. It speaks of "the two tables of the *testimony*," Exod. XXXI. 18; XXXII. 15, etc., and of "the tables of the *covenant*," Deut. IX. 9, 11, 15; Heb. IX. 4, etc. The Bible regards "the ten words," indeed, as precepts to be obeyed; but it far more prominently regards them as the foundation and evidence of special privileges accorded to Jehovah's people—as a charter of rights, rather than a code of prohibitions.

"The ten words" are not the only decalogue in this part of the Pentateuch; critical scholars have shown that many of the other laws, especially those now found nearest "the ten words" in Exodus, are given in groups of tens or of fives.

One reading only the account of the giving of "the ten words" now found in Deuteronomy, would doubtless get the impression that they were first given orally, then presently afterward written by the finger of God, then destroyed and re-written, and then immediately placed in the ark, which had previously been

prepared for that purpose. If he afterward read the account in Exodus, he would find that it contradicted, in several points, the impressions he had formed from reading Deuteronomy. On closer examination, he would find that there is no real contradiction between the accounts, but that, for lack of information, he had misunderstood some of the statements of Deuteronomy. If, pursuing the study, he took pains to put the two accounts together, he would reach substantially the statement of the matter that will be presently given; and in doing this, he would incidentally reach one or two critical conclusions of great importance. The account in Exodus is not such an account as any writer would ever have derived, by any process whatever, from that in Deuteronomy; the statements in Deuteronomy are precisely such as a writer might have taken from Exodus, provided he assumed that his readers were familiar with the Book of Exodus, or with the events there recorded. There is strong evidence that the writer of Deuteronomy was familiar, not only with those parts of the Exodus account of "the ten words" which the critics assign to the older prophetic writers, but also with those parts which they assign to the various strata of the priest-code. In other words, the Exodus account, as a whole, bears decided marks of being earlier than the first two discourses in Deuteronomy. This is one instance of a large group of critical phenomena bearing strongly against the theories now largely prevalent. Another and simpler instance occurs within the limits of our lessons; the fourth commandment presupposes the account of the creation given in the first chapter of Genesis; the critical scientist must either accept this as conclusive against the theory that the first chapter of Genesis was written several hundred years later than the twentieth of Exodus, or else he must proceed to re-adjust the phenomena, so as to make them fit the theory.

The order of events which the authors alike of Exodus and of Deuteronomy had in their minds, and intended to convey to their readers, is the following: First, "the ten words" were audibly spoken from Sinai; then Moses received the various precepts recorded in Exod. *xxi.*–*xxiii.*, now commonly described as the covenant-code; then, Exod. *xxiv.* 1, 2, Moses was directed to come up into the mountain, but first wrote the "book of the covenant," rehearsed it to the people, obtained their assent to it, and solemnized the occasion by a sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood, Exod. *xxiv.* 3–8; then he went up into the mountain, and after forty days received the first pair of tables; still later, he received the second pair, after the first were broken; and when at length the ark was made he put them in the ark, and the ark in its place in the sanctuary-tent.

The author of this part of Exodus certainly intended us to understand that "the ten words" were included in the book of the covenant that Moses read to the people; otherwise, directly after saying "God spoke all these words," to wit., "the ten words," he would not have continued by saying that Moses recounted to the people "all the words of Jehovah," as well as "the judgments," and that he wrote "all the words of Jehovah," and that the people replied, "all the words that Jehovah spoke we will do." Moreover, "the ten words" are habitually spoken of as the basis of Jehovah's covenant with Israel; the two tables were the tables of the covenant; the ark in which they were kept was the ark of the covenant; it is hardly possible that they were omitted from this covenant-book and covenant solemnization made just after they were given. The book of the covenant may very naturally have included "the ten words," the covenant-code, and the narrative concerning them; but whatever else it included, it certainly did not

omit "the ten words;" to have left them out would have been like leaving Christ out of the gospels.

It follows from this that the original of our present copies of "the ten words" is the copy that Moses wrote in the book of the covenant, and not the copy that God wrote, some months later, on the second pair of tables of stone. The two versions of the decalogue, in Exodus and Deuteronomy, are not two discrepant copies from the original copy in stone, proving that scribes took liberties even in transcribing so divine a document, making careless or willful changes in it. "The ten words" in Deuteronomy are a changed version, rather than a changed transcription of "the ten words" in Exodus; and we have no means of comparing either of them with "the ten words" as written on either pair of tables. The significance of the tables lies not in the supposed fact that they contained the first writing of "the ten words," from which all other copies were transcribed, but in the fact that they were authenticated by their divine handwriting, just as any charter of a people is authenticated by the signature of the sovereign, and that they were therefore to Israel the voucher given by God himself, of the reality of their covenant with him.

It is an important point gained in criticism thus to differentiate every statement made concerning the tables of stone from any statement anywhere made concerning sacred writings by Moses or by any other man; the only point of contact they have lies in the fact that there was a Mosaic copy of "the ten words," as well as a divine copy. And this view of the case is made prominent, not only in the accounts of the origin of the tables, but in those of the arrangements made for their care and custody. The law was kept beside the ark, the pot of manna and other national memorials, before the ark, but only the two tables within the ark, 1 Kgs. viii. 9; 2 Chron. v. 10. The attempt to prove from Heb. ix. that the pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded had once been in the ark, but were lost before the building of the temple, is based upon a mechanical exegesis, rather than upon a search for the intended meaning of the author. It is as if one should insist upon the grammatical construction of the reporter's statement that certain parties had put up a building 216 feet long, capable of accommodating 76 men, four stories high. The two tables were kept, not for purposes of study or appeal (it was death to look into the ark), but as a testimony, as sacred divine credentials; the law, on the other hand, was in the custody of the priests and elders for purposes of administration. The reputed origin of the two was not more diverse than the use regularly made of them.

The two tables, in the ark, with the mercy-seat over them, forming the central object of the sanctuary and its worship, represent the moral principle of the religion of Israel. God's covenant with Israel, as with any man in all time, is on the basis of the keeping of the "ten commandments;" yet there is propitiation for the repentant man, who is conscious of sin because he has failed to keep them. This two-fold symbol is to the religion of the Pentateuch what the life and death of Christ are to Christianity—a fixed standard of obligation, coupled with a proclamation of forgiving grace.

JULY 3. THE INFANT JESUS. Matt. ii. 1-12.

The student who wishes to examine for himself into the relations between the Old Testament and the New, will find the Gospel by Matthew, on the whole, better adapted to his purpose than any other book of the New Testament. Let

one begin, for example, by comparing the Greek forms of the proper names, Matt. i. 1-16, with that of their Hebrew originals; let him compare the list here given with that in the Old Testament history, noting especially the omissions, and trying to account for them; let him explain the three fourteens of generations mentioned in verse 17; let him compare *γένεσις*, verses 1 and 18, with the Greek name of the first Old Testament book; in verses 18-25, let him note the expressions "Holy Spirit," "just man," "Angel of the Lord," "appeared," the allusion in verse 21, the quotation in verse 23, the etymologies given for the names Jesus and Emmanuel; let him look up with especial care the Hebrew equivalent of the word Christ, and its use in the Old Testament. If he thus makes a beginning, he will find points for comparison multiplying themselves before him. He will find the second and the succeeding chapters as rich as the first. He should especially watch the verb-tenses, and the genitives and the articles, testing them sometimes by translation into Hebrew or Aramaic. It is particularly true that some scholars ought to do this kind of work with especial reference to some future revision of our Revised Bible; but it is also true that work of this sort would be peculiarly fruitful for purposes of practical exegesis, bringing us closer to the accurate meaning of the New Testament, and making that meaning vivid and picturesque for us.